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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 002356

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STATE FOR NEA/ARN, NEA/PA, NEA/AIA, INR/NESA, R/MR,
I/GNEA, B/BXN, B/BRN, NEA/PPD, NEA/IPA FOR ALTERMAN
USAID/ANE/MEA
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON IRAQ AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Summary

-- The lead story in all papers published today, March 28, highlights the "indefinite postponement" of the Arab summit meeting in Tunis. Other stories continue to report on developments in Iraq and the Palestinian Territories.

Editorial Commentary

-- "The other face of the first anniversary of the war"

Chief editor Taher Udwan writes on the back page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (03/28): "Sarcastically, some people say that the only accomplishment of Bush's occupation of Iraq was the launch of Al-Hurra, which is, in itself, a humble media accomplishment that people hardly know exists.. Today, due to the 'free media' of the occupation forces', journalists and photographers are shot directly by American soldiers; reporters hear the sounds of explosions and fail to arrive at the scene due to the military barriers of oppression spread around Baghdad and throughout Iraq; information is concealed, the media is pursued and strict censorship is imposed on it by an occupation that claims to represent a model for democracy and freedom in the Arab world. A year after the war, there exists another face to the occupation that is deliberately being concealed, namely the loss of security and stability, the prevalence of chaos and the rule of the law of the jungle."

-- "The point of the resolution"

Centrist, influential among the elite English daily Jordan Times (03/28) editorializes: "Friday's decision by the United States to veto a U.N. Security Council resolution that would have condemned the assassination of Hamas founder and spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmad Yassin is telling. First, it is Washington's unabashed acknowledgement that when it comes to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Bush administration sides with Israel. Second, it is confirmation that, contrary to official policy, this Republican administration supports targeted assassinations of political leaders. Third, and perhaps most unsettling, is that from the earliest days of this administration, when its principals steered clear of articulating their policy on the Arab-Israeli conflict and showed much more eagerness for 'regime change' in Iraq, the administration seems to have learned very little.. At issue before the Security Council's members was simply the assassination of Palestinian leaders per se and not all the other related issues that Washington insisted be considered as well.. Normally, the Security Council addresses only the issue or issues placed on its agenda and may not go beyond them. The agenda for the recent meeting of the Council was simply the assassination of the Hamas leader, nothing more, nothing less."

-- "On the sidelines of the Tunis summit"

Daily columnist Basem Sakijha writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (03/28): "All Arab countries without exception are talking about reform without really defining it. The Arab media outlets are full of talk about initiatives adopted by the leaders, but nothing seems to happen on the ground.. There are twenty-one Arab countries with twenty-one political regimes, where laws differ and so do the ruling methods, and where the only common thing right now is the oppression of citizens and their absent participation in the political process and mysterious future. No one can imagine an Arab reform

process that would be achieved unanimously under any circumstances.. The Palestinian cause used to bring the Arab countries together, even in principle. It is absent now. It even causes division. A country like Libya, that used to adopt the most radical proposals, now resorts to political realism.. The news we hear from Tunis portrays nothing but a farce, where the actors are desperately trying to influence the audience, who in turn respond to the jokes with bitter weeping."

GNEHM